Abstract

This paper summarizes recent evidence on what achievement tests measure; how achievement tests relate to other measures of cognitive ability like IQ and grades; the important skills that achievement tests miss or mismeasure, and how much these skills matter in life.

Achievement tests miss, or perhaps more accurately, do not adequately capture, soft skills—personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains. The larger message of this paper is that soft skills predict success in life, that they causally produce that success, and that programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies.

Highlights

- Achievement tests miss or mis-measure soft skills including personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences.
- Soft skills predict and produce success in life.
Programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in policy portfolios.

JEL classification
I20; D01

Keywords
Personality; Achievement tests; IQ; Cognition

This paper was presented as the Adam Smith Lecture at the Annual Meeting of the European Association of Labour Economists held in Cyprus, September 2011. This research was supported in part by the University of Chicago, A New Science of Virtues: A Project of the University of Chicago, the American Bar Foundation, a conference series from the Spencer Foundation, the JB & MK Pritzker Family Foundation, Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, the Geary Institute, University College Dublin, Ireland, NICHD R37 HD065072 and R01 HD054702, a European Research Council grant hosted by University College Dublin, DEVHEALTH 269874, a grant to the Becker Friedman Institute for Research and Economics from the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET), and an anonymous funder. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funders or commentators mentioned here. We thank Linor Kiknadze for research assistance.
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